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ABSTRACT

Recent accreditation guidelines of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, as well as various legislative initiatives, require two-year institutions in Kansas to develop measures of student achievement as part of their overall assessment of institutional effectiveness. In July and August of 1992, a subcommittee of the Kansas Council of Instructional Administrators sent a questionnaire to the deans of instruction at Kansas's community colleges to obtain information on each college's institutional effectiveness assessment plans. Survey findings, based on a 100% response rate from the 19 deans, included the following: (1) 79% of the deans indicated that the colleges had engaged in a review of their mission statements as a preparation for assessing institutional effectiveness, though only 47% had involved students in the review process; (2) only six deans viewed faculty members as "strongly committed" to the process of institutional effectiveness assessment; (3) only 42% of the colleges had developed a formal plan or model for assessing institutional effectiveness; (4) while most colleges conducted formal evaluations of academic programs, few utilized student-outcomes based evaluation; (5) the most frequently used measures of student achievement were retention rate, grade distribution analysis, pass rates on licensure exams, and employment rates; (6) at 12 colleges, the evaluation of faculty was considered part of the institutional assessment process; and (7) 74% of the deans reported that sustaining long-term faculty support represented a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of an institutional assessment plan. (PAA)

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A REPORT TO THE KANSAS COUNCIL OF INSTRUCTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS ON INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT AND STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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A REPORT TO

THE KANSAS COUNCIL OF INSTRUCTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

ON

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

AND

STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools serves as the regional accrediting agency for the community colleges in Kansas. The purpose of North Central is to examine institutional effectiveness in order to certify that institutions are deserving of accreditation. In 1989 the North Central Association initiated efforts to encourage colleges to incorporate into their institutional effectiveness assessment plans a component dealing with student academic achievement. In October of 1989, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education approved the following statement on behalf of the North Central Association:

> The Commission wants to make clear that all institutions are expected to assess the achievement of their students. With this statement we make explicit the Commission's position that student achievement is a critical component in assessing overall institutional effectiveness. Our expectation is that an institution has and is able to describe a program by which it documents student academic achievement.

In addition to the efforts of North Central to promote institutional effectiveness assessment, community colleges are responding to the directives of the Committee of Practitioners mandated by the Carl Perkins Legislation. The System of Measures and Standards of Performance that have been articulated by this committee will require community college career programs to report on the successful completion of vocational-technical competencies and workplace competencies by career program completers. These reported data will have to be validated by some methods of assessment of student achievement.

In responding to the guidelines of both North Central and the reporting requirements of Carl Perkins legislation, community colleges will be offered the opportunity to engage in significant and meaningful review of the curriculum and the processes by which they deliver instruction. The assessments made, the data collected, the plans that result can help college faculty understand more clearly the impact of their instructional efforts

and guide attempts to continuously improve and enhance curricula. If the results of these processes are used in the preparation of budgets and the reallocation of resources, colleges will be able to get maximum impact out of the resources available for instruction. The data resulting from assessment, if considered in context and appropriately used, can increase credibility with external legislative and funding agencies and give the consumer increased confidence in the effectiveness of educational efforts. The effect of institutional effectiveness assessment will be to document accountability, increase professionalism, enhance curricula and instruction, assist in recruiting both students and faculty, and guide colleges in more efficient budgeting and planning. In a time of limited resources this process can restore credibility to education and significantly assist community colleges in fulfilling their missions and goals.

In response to current efforts to establish institutional effectiveness plans and implement outcomes-based student achievement measurements, the Kansas Council of Instructional Administrators appointed a subcommittee to study the status of institutional effectiveness assessment in Kansas community colleges. This subcommittee consisted of Bob Paxton, Cindy Hoss, Daun Anderson, and Ken Gibson. The subcommittee met in December of 1991. At that meeting the subcommittee outlined two tasks: first, the subcommittee would research the literature on institutional effectiveness assessment to provide a bibliography on the subject for community college deans of instruction; second, the subcommittee would send a letter to Kansas community college deans requesting a description of practices being utilized throughout the state. Bob Paxton and Cindy Hoss agreed to do the search of the literature and Ken Gibson agreed to solicit input from the deans of instruction and to use that input to construct a questionnaire to be sent to all colleges during the summer of 1992. After some consideration, Bob Paxton and Cindy Hoss recommended that rather than preparing an annotated bibliography, the Kansas Council of Instructional Administrators should purchase copies of the League for Innovation abstract entitled: **Assessing Institutional Effectiveness in Community Colleges, 1990.** Those abstracts have been purchased and are included as an appendix to this report.

All of the deans of instruction in Kansas community colleges received a request for information on each college's institutional effectiveness assessment plans. Responses were received from 10 of the 19 colleges. Based on an analysis of those responses, Dr. Gibson created a questionnaire to solicit more specific information from the colleges. During July and August, 19 questionnaires were sent to the deans of instruction in Kansas community colleges. Each of the 19 colleges responded for a response rate of 100%.

THE FINDINGS

ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY RESULTS

In order to identify assessment techniques and collect data, it is necessary to first define the criteria against which performance is to be measured. The League for Innovation abstract points out the importance of a clearly defined and well understood mission statement as the initial step in the assessment process. The responses to question #1 suggest that Kansas community colleges recognize the importance of the mission statement to the assessment process. Seventy-nine per cent of the colleges indicated that they had engaged in a review of the mission statement as a preparation for assessing institutional effectiveness. Responses to the second part of the question indicate that most of the important constituencies of the college participated in the mission review. However, it should be noted that less than half of the colleges indicated student involvement in the review process.

1. **Has your college conducted a formal review of its mission statement as part of the institutional effectiveness assessment process?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
YES	15	79%
NO	4	21%

If yes, indicate which of the following groups were involved in the review process.

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Board of Trustees	13	87%
College Administration	15	100%
Faculty	15	100%
Student Services	14	93%
Students	7	47%
Community Members	9	60%

The literature on institutional effectiveness assessment makes it very clear that this process must be supported by the various constituencies at the college if it is to be successful. The responses to question #2 suggest that the process may face some difficulty in Kansas community colleges without an increase in faculty support. There is an obvious gap between the perception of the commitment of administration/board and the perception of commitment by the faculty. In the majority of colleges, the administrators and board members are viewed as "strongly committed" to this process of institutional effectiveness assessment, but only a third or less of the colleges view the faculty and community members as "strongly committed." This finding would suggest that there needs to be much more discussion with faculty, students, and members of the community on the importance of assessment in light of accreditation standards, current legislation, and emphases on accountability and quality. Efforts to improve instruction through assessment will only be successful if the faculty and the community perceive their value and support their impact.

2. **Which of the following individuals or groups would you characterize as "strongly committed" to the assessment of institutional effectiveness.**

	RESPONDED	RANK
Board of Trustees	11	4
President	13	3
Chief Instructional Officer	18	1
Chief Student Affairs Officer	15	2
Faculty	6	5
Community Members	2	6
Other: Director of Planning	1	7

The importance of institutional effectiveness to community colleges is reflected by the responses to question #3. Seventy-four per cent of the colleges indicated that they had appointed a special task force and/or committee to deal with the issue. However, it is important to note the lack of participation by students and community members in this process. This might suggest that the movement to involve business people and other community members in the improvement of education may need to be promoted more extensively.

3. **Has your college appointed an institutional task force or committee to guide the college's efforts in institutional assessment?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
YES	14	74%
NO	5	26%

If yes, how were the members chosen?

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Appointed	9	64%
Nominated	1	7%
Volunteer	1	7%
Election	1	7%

Which of the following groups are represented by one or more members?

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Administration	12	86%
Faculty	13	93%
Student Services	13	93%
Institutional Research	6	43%
Students	4	29%
Community	1	7%
Other: Classified Staff/Trustees	2	14%

The responses to question #4 suggest that a number of colleges have yet to meet the requirement of North Central that a strategic institutional effectiveness plan be created. Less than 50% of the colleges indicated that they had a formal plan or model.

4. **Which of the following best describes your college's current strategic plan for assessing your institution's effectiveness?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
A written formal plan or model has been developed	8	42%
An informal plan has been developed; nothing in writing	2	11%
Nothing has been developed yet; we're working on it	6	32%
No plans to develop an assessment plan at the present time	2	11%

Much of the current discussion of effectiveness assessment deals with efforts at the institutional level; however, for college-wide assessment to be effective, the various programs must be actively involved in the process. The responses to questions #5 and #6 suggest that slightly over half of the colleges currently do effectiveness assessment at the program level, but those that do not are planning to implement such processes.

5. **Does your college have committees charged with assessing institutional effectiveness at the program level?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes, for some programs	3	16%
Yes, for all programs	7	37%
No	8	42%
Not Applicable	1	5%

6. **If no, when do you anticipate appointing a task force for this purpose?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Fall 1992	4	44%
Spring 1993	1	11%
No plans to initiate such a task force at this time	3	33%
Other	1	11%

While assessment and evaluation are not necessarily the same activity and while current program evaluations are not necessarily outcomes-based, the responses to question #7 suggest that academic programs are evaluated regularly in Kansas community colleges. These evaluation processes might serve as a starting point for the implementation of outcomes-based assessment. The responses to question #7 suggest that academic program evaluation is extensive in Kansas community colleges; however, the responses to question #8 suggest that these evaluations may not be student outcomes based, for until faculty can reach agreement on intended student outcomes, it will be difficult to assess student academic achievement.

7. **Does your college conduct formal evaluations of academic programs?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes, annually	5	26%
Yes, bi-annually	1	5%
Yes, every five years	6	32%
Yes, for accreditation/no regular schedule/as needed	3	16%
No	5	26%

8. **Have faculty in these programs reached written agreement on the intended student outcomes for the programs?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes	3	16%
Draft in progress	6	32%
No	9	47%
Not Applicable	1	5%

The responses to question #9 suggest some attempt to use standardized tests to meet the requirement of student achievement assessment; however, the results may confirm a level of discomfort on the part of colleges and especially faculty to depend on standardized tests for outcomes measurement. There has been much discussion in the literature concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using standardized tests, but colleges will need to proceed with caution in this area if they want to promote faculty support for an outcomes-based curriculum.

9. **Do you use any of the following standardized measures of student academic achievement as part of your program evaluation?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
College Assessment of Academic Proficiency	4	21%
College Base	1	5%
Other: Asset (ACT)	1	5%

The responses to question #10 indicate that the most often used measures of student achievement in Kansas community colleges are retention rates, grade distribution analysis, license examinations, employment rates, and transfer data from four-year colleges and universities. A second level of instruments consists of competency based profiles, attitudinal and/or opinion surveys, program specific student withdrawal analysis, graduate profiles, and instruments developed by and used in specific departments for all sections of a course. Finally, those assessment techniques used least of all are the locally constructed tests developed for college-wide use, capstone courses and/or experiences, and portfolios. The most often used techniques appear to result from practices that were already in place prior to the emphasis on effectiveness assessment. Most colleges have been doing retention studies, grade distribution analysis, and collecting information from transfer institutions for a number of years. In those programs in which national or state registry examinations are required, these results have been important to community colleges for a number of years also. The problem with employment and transfer data, however, as always has been the lack of numbers to make possible significant statistical analysis. In addition, North Central has insisted that if colleges use grades as an indicator of student academic achievement, the faculty must deliberate and determine standardized criteria and rationale for grades so that a grade in one course or section implies the same level of competency as the same grade in another course or section. While grades have always been an indicator of student success, there have been difficulties in comparison across individual course lines. If students are getting better grades, can we isolate what increased learning contributes to that phenomenon? Data from the colleges to which our students transfer would appear to be a valuable measure of student success; however, it has been difficult to get such data in a complete and meaningful format so that we can make conclusions with confidence.

10. **Which of the following methodologies do you use to assess academic program effectiveness?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Attitudinal and/or opinion surveys	9	47%
Locally constructed test(s) developed for college-wide use	3	16%
Competency based student profiles	10	53%
Capstone courses and/or experiences	3	16%
Portfolios	3	16%
License examinations	13	68%
Employment rates	12	63%
Transfer data from 4-year colleges or universities	11	58%
Retention rate	14	74%
Grade distribution analysis	14	74%
Program-specific student withdrawal analysis	7	37%
Graduate profiles	6	32%
Instruments developed by and used in specific departments for all sections of a course	6	32%

The responses to questions #11, #12, #13 deal with those non-academic areas of the college such as student services, administrative services, institutional research, etc. Where such evaluation is conducted, the process involves collecting opinions reported on surveys or exit interviews. The responses suggest that there has been little attempt to get staff in those areas to articulate intended outcomes statements.

11. **Does your college conduct formal evaluations of non-academic programs?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes, annually	4	21%
Yes, bi-annually	1	5%
Yes, every five years	3	16%
Yes, Student Support Services/every 10 years for NCA	2	11%
No	8	42%
Not Applicable	1	5%

12. **Have staff members in these areas reached written agreement on the intended outcomes for their programs?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes	1	5%
Draft in progress	3	16%
No	13	68%

13. **If yes, which of the following research methodologies are used to measure these non-academic program outcomes?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Attitudinal surveys	6	32%
Exit interviews	4	21%
Quantitative data on tasks performed	3	16%

A caveat might be offered to Kansas community colleges as a result of the responses to question #14. Approximately 67% of the colleges indicated that they considered the evaluation of faculty to be part of the institutional effectiveness assessment process. On page 48 of **Assessing Institutional Effectiveness in Community Colleges**, the authors state: "Assessment results should certainly not be used as part of faculty evaluation..." Given the results of question #2 which suggest that faculty are not highly committed to this process; given the results of question #8 which indicate that

much work has yet to be done to get faculty to articulate intended student outcomes for academic programs; given that the results of question #16 suggest that getting and maintaining faculty support is one of the major barriers to the success of outcomes assessment, it would appear to be important to make clear from the very beginning that outcomes assessment is not another name for faculty evaluation. The community colleges in Kansas have a faculty evaluation process which is mandated by state statute. They do not need for effectiveness assessment to be a part of that process. If proficiency statements are kept at the course (where multi-sectioned), program, degree, or college level, individual faculty will not be threatened. It is important to realize that if the assessment results are not satisfactory there are many factors which impact those measurements, including facilities, resources, technology, faculty, entry level skills of students, just to mention a few.

14. **Do you consider the evaluation of individual faculty and/or other personnel to be part of your institutional effectiveness process?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes	12	63%
No	6	32%

The responses to question #15 indicate that the Kansas community colleges take seriously the charge to create institutional effectiveness plans and to measure student achievement and that they want to learn more about how to accomplish these objectives.

15. **Should there be a state-wide resource for sharing assessment plans and/or experiences?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes	19	100%
No	0	0%

If yes, please indicate which of the following you feel would be most effective at accomplishing this objective.

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Create a position within the state department of education	1	5%
Create a permanent resource center at the state department level	4	21%
Plan a state-wide annual conference on institutional effectiveness	16	84%
Publish a newsletter to facilitate sharing ideas, experiences, and research results	11	58%
Other: Use KACC	1	5%

The responses to question #16 clearly demonstrate the importance of faculty participation in any institutional effectiveness plan or student outcomes measurement. The majority of community colleges clearly recognizes that faculty support is essential to the success of any plan. Articulating program and student outcomes and designing appropriate methods of data collecting will be significant barriers to success without faculty support. The five barriers that were most identified as impeding success revolved around the faculty or activities that must be performed by faculty. In comparison to the problem of obtaining faculty participation, obtaining appropriate funding, student participation, and administrative support were seen as less important problems.

In creating exit level competencies as criteria against which our efforts can be measured, faculty will be taking advantage of the opportunity to define themselves, their efforts, and their institutions. It is better that faculty of community colleges define what their curricula are designed to do and validate their success in accomplishing those goals than that they wait for external agencies to mandate regional and national standardized testing which may negatively impact their efforts. A further caveat in this area concerns the underprepared students. Those who promote outcomes-based curricula should realize that if colleges are to enable students to reach agreed upon exit level standards, they may have to be more rigid in the entry level standards they set for programs.

16. **In general, all of the following are important when conducting an institutional effectiveness assessment. Given the goal of obtaining useable information for improving both the product and the process of education, which of the following represent significant obstacles or barriers to successful implementation of an institutional effectiveness assessment plan on your campus.**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Articulating measurable intended program outcomes	11	58%
Articulating measurable student achievement outcomes	12	63%
Obtaining initial faculty support	11	58%
Sustaining long-term faculty commitment	14	74%
Obtaining continuing administrative support	6	32%
Designing appropriate methods of data collection/analysis	11	58%
Motivating students to contribute valid efforts/information	7	37%
Obtaining appropriate funding	9	47%
Other: 1) Obtaining faculty/administrative consensus when faced with negatives; 2) Lack of top-level leadership	3	16%

This study suggests that Kansas community colleges are committed to institutional effectiveness assessment, are searching for ways to initiate outcomes-based measurement, are willing to document success and validate performance when such activities lead to credibility and professional accountability. It also appears to suggest that the colleges would be receptive to guidance, direction, and the sharing of efforts in this area. All 19 of the colleges agreed that there should be some state-wide resource for sharing assessment plans and/or experiences; the vast majority thought this should take the form of an annual conference, and all colleges indicated that they would definitely send representatives to such a conference. This response might suggest that there is a significant opportunity for the Competency-based Center at Washburn University to be more proactive in assisting community colleges with this issue.

17. **Would your college send representatives to a state-wide conference on institutional effectiveness and student outcomes assessment?**

	RESPONDED	PERCENTAGE
Yes	19	100%
No	0	0%

WORKS CONSULTED

Assessment Workbook. Regional Seminars, Spring 1991. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Chicago: Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 1991.

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